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**‘They’ve Conspired against Us’: Understanding the Role of Social Identification and
Conspiracy Beliefs in Justification of Ingroup Collective Behaviour**

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Running head: Social Identity and Conspiracy Theories

‘They’ve Conspired against Us’: Understanding the Role of Social Identification and
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Abstract

The present research investigates conditions under which beliefs in conspiracy theories predict the desire to justify ingroup behaviour in the context of intergroup conflict. We propose that within the context of Ukraine’s intergroup conflict over the annexation of Crimea, supporters (but not opponents) of the “Euromaidan” social movement are likely to validate protesters’ collective actions as just to the extent that they believe that the authorities are engaged in annexation-related conspiracies. We also examine the moderating role of perceived political corruption in these processes. Using a public opinion survey of 315 Ukrainians, we found support for our hypothesized moderated mediation model—identification with “Euromaidan” increased beliefs in the annexation-related conspiracy theories, which in turn, increased justification of protesters’ actions in the setting of intergroup conflict. However, this mediation was only observed among those

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supporters of the Euromaidan who perceived political corruption to be at a low or average level.

Keywords: conspiracy beliefs, social identification, opinion-based group, collective action, justification, perceived corruption

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Ethics Statement

This study was carried out in accordance with the recommendations of Research Ethics Committee, University of Limerick with written informed consent from all subjects. All subjects gave written informed consent in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. The protocol was approved by the Research Ethics Committee.

‘They’ve Conspired against Us’: Understanding the Role of Social Identification and Conspiracy Beliefs in Justification of Ingroup Collective Behaviour

The contention that individuals’ beliefs in conspiracy theories tend to coincide with their ideological views seems to be well-founded. Extant research has shown that a conspiracy-tinged rhetoric tends to be ideologically motivated (e.g., Lewandowsky,

Oberauer, & Gignac, 2013; Newheiser, Farias, & Tausch, 2011; Uscinski & Parent, 2014; van Prooijen, Krouwel & Pollet, 2015), and, thus, may have predictable effects on ingroup behaviours in the context of intergroup conflict. In so far as ideology is central to one's commitment to social groups and causes, it follows that ideologically-charged social identities (often linked to what is called *opinion-based group memberships*; see McGarty, Blüch, Thomas, & Bongiorno, 2009, for an overview) should be relevant to our understanding of why some people in society may be particularly prone to endorse specific conspiracy theories. Such opinion-based groups, typically formed around ideas about the way the world should be, have been regarded as an excellent predictor of coordinated collective behaviour (e.g., Baysu & Phalet, 2017; Chayinska, Minescu, & McGarty, 2017). However, the idea that a coherent conspiracy-based belief system is aligned with individuals' opinion-based group membership and robustly predictive of social action, remains relatively underexplored. Moreover, little research has attempted to conceptually clarify and include contextual moderators of apparent differences in conspiracy endorsement (see Douglas, Sutton, & Cichocka, 2017, for recent summaries).

The present research is designed to contribute to a more systematic understanding of conspiracy beliefs as an intergroup phenomenon by presenting a theoretical integration of the core aspects of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and insights from opinion-based group membership framework (McGarty, et al., 2009). More precisely, we aim to examine the antecedent conditions that elicit one's tendency a) to believe in conspiracy theories and b) use such conspiracy explanations in the justification of ingroup collective behaviour in the context of intergroup conflict. First, we contend that one's commitment to an ideologically charged opinion-based group may constitute the antecedent condition under which people become more prone to believe in particular conspiracy theories.

Secondly, given the defensive function of social identities and the instrumental role of conspiracy explanations, we argue that identifiers (but not non-identifiers) with a certain ideologically charged group will be particularly motivated to use such explanations to validate the ingroup's behaviour.

Finally, we seek to contribute to a more refined understanding of the contextual factors that moderate potential causal relationships between ideologically charged social identities, conspiracy beliefs, and ingroup justification tendencies. Given the emerging evidence for the moderating role of distrust in conspiracy predispositions (e.g., Darwin, Neave, & Holmes, 2011; Miller, Saunders, & Farhart, 2016), we seek to explore whether individuals' perception of the political system as corrupt interferes with social identification and conspiracy beliefs in justifying ingroup actions. The overall idea is to show that there are striking differences in conspiracy thinking not only between identifiers and non-identifiers, but also within the group of identifiers with a certain opinion-based group, depending on people's trust in political institutions.

Social Identification with Opinion-Based Groups and Conspiracy Beliefs

Psychological group membership based on shared ideological beliefs (also known as opinion-based group membership) can significantly influence individuals' beliefs in conspiracy theories. This evidence stems from empirical research on the effects of social identification with religious groups (e.g., Mashuri & Zaduqisti, 2013; Newheiser, et al., 2011) and political parties (e.g., Edelson, Alduncin, Krewson, Sieja, & Uscinski, 2017; Smallpage, Enders, & Uscinski, 2017; van Prooijen, et al., 2015) on one's tendency to engage in motivated conspiracy endorsement. For instance, in the context of a situational threat related to terrorist attacks in Indonesia, Mashuri and Zaduqisti (2013) have experimentally revealed that people with salient Muslim identity were more likely to

believe that Western countries were accountable for instigating terrorism in their country than those with non-salient religion-based identity.

Recent insights gleaned from the literature suggest that people with extreme political leanings are more prone to endorse different conspiracy theories (e.g., Edelson, et al., 2017; van Prooijen, et al., 2015). For instance, Edelson et al. (2017) have shown that people were more likely to believe in electoral fraud depending on whether the party they identified themselves with won the elections or not. In a similar vein, Uscinski and Parent (2014) have shown how one's partisan identity (i.e., Republican and Democrat) interacted with a sense of relative group deprivation and inferior group status to predict beliefs in election fraud: individuals on the losing (vs. winning) side of political processes were more likely to believe in election-related conspiracy theories. Van Prooijen et al. (2015) found that conspiracy beliefs were associated with extremist political beliefs at either side of the political spectrum (i.e., "left" and "right"): political extremes were more likely to believe in conspiracy theories than political moderates because of their highly structured thinking style in which complex social events and groups tend to be categorized in terms of binary opposition. Thus, a necessary step in explaining why individuals believe in specific conspiracy theories is acknowledging that their ideologies, that is, set of deeply held worldviews (i.e., one's silent opinion-based group membership) may play a causal role in the outcome.

Social Identification, Conspiracy Accusations, and Justification of Ingroup Collective Behaviour

Research based on the social identity tradition has long suggested that individuals have a 'psychological immune system' that helps them to see their ingroup and its actions in a positive light, especially in the situations of moral ambiguity (e.g., Major, Quinton, &

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Schmader, 2003) and intergroup conflict (e.g., Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999). In particular, research has shown that group members may adopt various cognitive strategies that will allow them to interpret reality in a manner that protects collective self-integrity and self-esteem (e.g., Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). Recently, some authors (e.g., Bilewicz, Winiewski, Kofta, & Wojcik, 2013; Cichocka, Marchlewska, Golec de Zavala, & Olechowski, 2016) have shown that the use of a conspiracy-tinged rhetoric is predicted by individuals' motivation to defend their silent social identities. For instance, Cichocka and colleagues (Cichocka, et al., 2016) have demonstrated that people with a defensive form of ingroup positivity (i.e., collective narcissists) were generally prone to attribute conspiracy explanations to certain events, because attribution of blame to others substantially allowed them to protect a positive image of the ingroup. These authors, however, have not considered the possibility that beliefs in conspiracy theories can also act as a mediator in the existing relationship, and, as such, may be recruited by identifiers to defensively construct or restore a positive image of their subjectively valued group. Given the correlational evidence Cichocka et al. (2016) have provided it appears reasonable to expect that identifiers with an ideologically charged opinion-based group will be predisposed to believe in specific conspiracy theories to the extent that the latter allows them to justify the ingroup's collective behaviour in the context of intergroup conflict.

To conclude, recent work had already shown that group members strategically endorse conspiracy theories to satisfy particular ingroup needs. The present study suggests that conspiracy accusations should henceforth be studied in relation to ingroup justification tendencies.

The Moderating Role of the Perceived Political Corruption

The other key caveat which the present study acknowledges is that the perceived corruption of the political system is likely to be both psychologically consequential of the salient group membership and robustly predictive of beliefs in conspiracy theories. Some authors (e.g., Della Porta & Vannucci, 1997; Miller, et al., 2016) have suggested that people who perceive political corruption to be an embedded feature of states' political institutions will be more prone to see politicians as those who tend to side-step or even tailor specific arrangements to fit their personal rather than the country's best interests. For instance, Miller et al. (2016) have shown how people who were both highly knowledgeable about politics and distrustful of the authorities were generally predisposed to endorse ideologically motivated conspiracy theories. Lending further credence to this speculation, other scholars have demonstrated that conspiracy beliefs are a by-product of a cluster of personality-related traits revolving around distrust (e.g., Abalakina-Paap, Stephan, Craig, & Gregory, 1999; Darwin, et al., 2011), delusional thinking (e.g., Swami, et al., 2011), and alienation (e.g., Brotherton, French, & Pickering, 2013). Consistent with these studies, believing in conspiracy theories allow people who are high in these traits to reject any official explanation offered by the "establishment" as being false. We thus examine whether and how perceived political corruption may moderate the effect of social identification with an opinion-based group and conspiracy beliefs on ingroup justification tendencies.

An opportunity to test these ideas presented itself in the context of the social-political conflict in Ukraine, three years after the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation.

Study Background: The Conspiracy Theories on Crimea's Annexation

The annexation of Ukraine's Crimea has been regarded as the 'fastest effective secession in modern history' (Christakis, 2015, p. 77). In the span of three weeks, Russian Special Forces invaded the peninsula, the regional pro-Moscow authorities called for a referendum on the status of Crimea, in which a sizeable majority of the population voted to join Russia. This allowed the Russian parliament to formalize Crimea's unilateral secession from Ukraine two days after the official results of the referendum were revealed (e.g., Myers, 2014). Although Ukraine's top officials denounced Russia's military takeover of Crimea aligning their condemnations with the anti-Russia protests in Kyiv, some commentators have raised doubts as to whether or not the state's government were bribed to let Crimea go (e.g., Weigel, 2014). In 2017, three years after these events (and at the time of this study), the Ukrainian state authorities have not yet presented a coherent strategy to de-occupy the peninsula in spite of the seemingly global condemnation of Russia's invasion and the domestic (latent) resistance movement (e.g., Makarenko, 2017). A combination of the government's political inaction and rampant state-sanctioned corruption in Ukraine have generated a climate of public discontent and frustration (Holcomb, Conlon, & Hryckowian, 2016; Khylyko & Tytarchuk, 2017).

Study Aims

The present research was designed to make three novel contributions to the literature. First, based on social identity theory we argue that people's tendency to believe in a particular set of conspiracy theories should be predicted by their social identification with specific opinion-based groups. Within the context of Ukraine's intergroup conflict over the annexation of Crimea, we argue that supporters (but not opponents) of the "Euromaidan" social movement of resistance to Russia will be likely to believe in the

conspiracy theories. Secondly, we argue that supporters of the Euromaidan will be more likely to justify ingroup collective behaviour to the extent that they attribute nefarious intent to the government by endorsing annexation-related conspiracy theories. Finally, we expect to reveal the moderating role of perceived political corruption in these processes: identifiers who perceive the state's political institutions to be corrupt may be particularly likely to believe in the government's involvement in the annexation, and thus, will be more prone to justify the ingroup collective action in the course of confrontation. Figure 1 displays the conceptual model.

[Figure 1 about here]

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited using snowball convenience sampling. The data were collected between March 30 and April 21, 2017, three years after Ukraine's peninsula of Crimea was annexed by the Russian Federation. After consenting to participate, participants completed socio-demographic measures and then were asked to complete the survey¹. The items were available in Ukrainian. In order to guarantee coherence and validity of the questions, all items were translated from English to Ukrainian and back using a standard translation-back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1970). Participants were required to be of the Ukrainian nationality and aged over 18.

Four hundred and seven volunteers entered the survey. Three hundred and fifteen participants (77.40 %) completed all survey items and were included in the final sample.

¹ The survey also included the measures of self-blame, group-based emotion in relation to Crimea's annexation, perceived efficacy of collective action. However, these measures were not relevant to this research.

The sample ranged in age from 18 to 76 (M age 20.85 years, $SD = 12.89$) and comprised 54.8 % women. Participants were highly educated (45.8 % having graduated from university), 55.9 % were employed full time, and 65.4 % indicated Ukrainian as their first language. Some 77 % reported that they completed this survey while in Ukraine, 23.1 % – while living abroad.

Measures

Socio-demographics. Participants indicated age, gender, current residence, educational level, employment status and mother tongue (i.e., Ukrainian, Russian, other).

Social identification with supporters of the Euromaidan. Participants rated four items used to measure their social identification with the Euromaidan protest movement. They were asked to what extent they think of themselves as of a ‘supporter’, ‘participant’, ‘typical member’, and ‘activist’ of the Euromaidan movement ($\alpha = .78$). These and other measures below used five-point Likert scales labelled from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

Social identification with opponents of the Euromaidan. Two items were used to assess the extent to which participants identified themselves as an ‘opponent’, and ‘antagonist’ of the Euromaidan movement ($\alpha = .85$).

Crimea-related conspiracy theories. Five items, most of which were adapted from Douglas and Leite (2017), were used to measure participants’ beliefs in the conspiracy theories over Crimea’s annexation. These items were: “There is an influential secretive group that has long ago decided the ‘destiny’ of Crimea’s question”, “Political decisions about Crimea’s annexation have been greatly influenced by a small influential political group”, “Important things in this country happen, which citizens are never informed about”,

“A small group of people makes all of the political decisions to suit their own interests”, and “In Ukraine, a small group of people secretly manipulates political events” ($\alpha = .81$).

Perceived political corruption. Further participants were asked: “How corrupt or incorrupt do you think are each of the following groups?” The five groups were: courts, police, parliament’s majority, parliament’s opposition, and government. A principal component analysis (PCA) revealed that all five items loaded highly into one factor which explained 55.54 % of the total variance ($KMO = .74, \chi^2 = 528.66, df = 10, p < .000$). The items were averaged to yield an index of perceived political corruption ($\alpha = .80$).

Justification of the protesters’ collective behaviour. Four items were used to measure respondents’ evaluation of the protesters’ collective behaviour during the anti-Russia protests over Crimea’s annexation in the spring of 2014. Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they felt that the actions of social activists during the Euromaidan events were ‘moral’, ‘upright’, ‘just’, and ‘illegal’ (reverse coded). The results of the PCA supported a 1-factor structure of the scale: KMO analysis yielded an index of .79 and BTS ($\chi^2 = 548.67, df = 6, p < .000$) with the items accounting for 71.57 % of the total variance. The internal consistency estimate of reliability was excellent ($\alpha = .87$). The full data file can be found at this link on the OSF site.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Little’s MCAR test indicated that data were missing completely at random ($\chi^2 (55) = 64.41, p = .18$). Therefore, missing values were not problematic and analysis was conducted without imputation being made (92 cases were removed from the final analysis). The preliminary analyses involved bivariate analysis and linear hierarchical regression to ensure there were no violations of the assumptions. In this step, predictor variables were

centered when computing interaction terms to minimize colinearity. The correlations between all variables, means, and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

Overall, the regression analyses indicated that social identification with the supporters of the Euromaidan (Model 1) was a significant positive predictor of the justification of the protesters' collective behaviour ($B=.58, t = 12.47, p < .001$), whereas social identification with the opponents of the movement (Model 2) had a significant negative effect ($B= -.23, t = -4.07, p < .001$) on the outcome variable. When testing Model 1 for the potential effects of the moderator and mediator, we found that social identification with the supporters of the Euromaidan predicted justification of the protesters' collective behaviour (adjusted $R^2 = .33, \Delta F(2,31) = 155.56, p = .000$) at Step 1 and that the explanatory power of the model was significantly improved after adding the interaction term ($R^2 = .39, \Delta F(2,31) = 15.36, p = .000$) at Step 2 and conspiracy beliefs ($R^2 = .39, \Delta F(2,31) = 4.41, p = .037$) at Step 3, respectively. Thus, the more people identified as supporters of the Euromaidan, the more likely they were to evaluate the actions of the ingroup as just, and these evaluations were further strengthened by their perceptions of the political institutions as corrupt and beliefs that there were larger conspiracies at work around the annexation of Crimea by Russia.

Main Analysis

We conducted two sets of moderated mediation analyses to test whether the effects of social identification with the supporters (IV1) and opponents (IV2) of the Euromaidan protest movement on justification of protesters' collective action (DV) were mediated by beliefs in the annexation-related conspiracy theories (MV), and whether these indirect effects would be amplified by perceiving political corruption (W).

Bootstrapping with 1,000 resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) revealed that an indirect effect of social identity on justification of the protesters' actions through the annexation-related conspiracy beliefs was significant for the supporters of the Euromaidan ($IE = -.05$, $SE = .02$, 95% $CI = [-.10, -.01]$; Figure 2a) but not for the opponents of the movement ($IE = -.02$, $SE = .03$, 95% $CI = [-.09, .03]$; Figure 2b). Thus, the more people identified themselves as the supporters of the Euromaidan movement, the more they were likely to believe in the annexation-related conspiracy theories, which, in turn, led to their validation of the ingroup collective actions in this conflict as just and moral. In contrast, the more people identified themselves as the opponents of the Euromaidan movement, the less they were likely to justify the protesters' behaviour. Consistent with our prediction, the relationship between their social identities and conspiracy beliefs was non-significant. Interestingly, for the opponents of the Euromaidan the link between conspiracy beliefs and justification of the protesters' actions was significantly positive ($b = .27$, $SE = .06$, 95% $CI = .16, .38$, Figure 2b), pointing out to the fact that not only identifiers with the movement but also its ideological opponents were keen to validate actions of the protesters as just and moral when they held a set of beliefs that powerful groups within the government plotted for the annexation.

[Figures 2a and 2b about here]

Consistent with our prediction, the moderating variable significantly affected the magnitude of the existing relationship. However, it also showed an unexpected direction: when the supporters of the Euromaidan perceived corruption to be at a low ($SE = .07$, 95% $CI = [.02, .13]$) or average ($SE = .02$, 95% $CI = [.01, .05]$) level, they were more likely to believe in the conspiracy theories surrounding Crimea's annexation and justify the ingroup's behaviour. However, when corruption was perceived to be excessive, the

identifiers were less likely ($SE = -.02$, 95% $CI = [-.06, -.00]$) to believe in the conspiracy theories and justify their own actions via such beliefs. Thus, the perception of political corruption as excessive had paradoxical effects not only on the supporters' conspiracy beliefs but also on their justification of ingroup collective behaviour.

Discussion

The results of this study present evidence for the hypothesis that identifiers (as opposed to non-identifiers) with the Euromaidan protests movement were particularly likely to justify the ingroup's collective behaviour in the context of intergroup conflict over annexed Crimea to the extent that they believed that powerful groups within the government plotted for the annexation. The results also point to the counterintuitive effects of perceived political corruption in moderating people's justification of ingroup actions.

Our findings contribute to the understanding of two processes. The first is that they help to understand the role of social identification with specific opinion-based groups in determining one's tendency to believe in particular conspiracy theories. Previous research (e.g., Mashuri & Zaduqisti, 2013; Newheiser, et al., 2011; van Prooijen, et al., 2015) has shown that people with stable ideological belief systems were more prone to endorse specific conspiracy theories. In the present study, we sought to make few steps further in highlighting the role of social identification processes in conspiracy thinking. We revealed that ideologically charged social identities formed around sharply antagonistic public opinions (i.e., pro and against the Euromaidan movement) acted as excellent predictors of conspiracy beliefs as they allowed identifiers to extrapolate the idea that there was a powerful and evil outgroup engaged in nefarious acts against the ingroup. Additionally, we found that conspiracy beliefs served a defensive function of social identity: by accusing the authorities in having let Crimea's annexation happen, supporters of the Euromaidan were

likely to justify the ingroup's collective efforts (i.e., mass-protest actions) aimed at winning back the peninsula.

These findings are in line with the results of previous studies (e.g., Uscinski & Parent, 2014) showing how the division into "us" and "them" paves the way for motivational conspiracy endorsement in which individuals on the losing (vs. winning) side of political processes are particularly likely to endorse conspiracy theories that help them justify the ingroup behaviour. Thus, the findings of the present study support the importance of considering the effects of one's salient psychological group memberships in understanding how conspiracy beliefs may be used by identifiers strategically to justify the ingroup's behaviour.

On the other hand, the results contribute to a better understanding of individual-level heterogeneity in endorsing conspiracy beliefs. We found that for people who in general were less suspicious of the misconduct of the governing authorities (low perceived political corruption), social identification with the protest movement boosted conspiracy beliefs, which in turn translated into higher willingness to justify ingroup collective behaviour. However, for the supporters of the Euromaidan movement who perceived the system to be excessively corrupt, beliefs in annexation-related conspiracy theories paradoxically flowed onto lesser justification of the ingroup's actions. This pattern is a new discovery that indicates how group justification tendencies (i.e., evaluating the ingroup favourably) by means of conspiracy accusations may be minimized by the inherent constraints of the social system. These seemingly paradoxical effects may be context-driven: in a society with a spread of corruption in the public sphere, the individual tendency to mistrust the system may make it difficult for people to muster up the evidence necessary to justify ingroup behaviour because of a diminished human agency to influence political

events. In other words, this finding indicates how perceiving the authorities to be both powerful and corrupt (i.e., having the last word in deciding collective fate) may constrain the individual tendency to justify ingroup collective behaviour.

Politically, this can also be explained by the fact that the legal status of protest itself was changed during the social movements of changing the regime (e.g., Cohen, 2014). This has created a vacuum of possibilities, where participating in the Euromaidan protests could be perceived as equally legal (by those believing in democratic participatory values) and illegal (by those abiding by the changed laws at the time of the Euromaidan movement). Asking people to evaluate protesters' collective action retrospectively may have resulted in a similar vacuum effect whereby people certain of having done the *just* thing, might still have been unsure whether their action was considered *legal* according to the then-official-government legislation.

To conclude, these findings add to the literature on conspiracy beliefs as they show for the first time that social identification with opinion-based groups is a powerful antecedent of motivational conspiracy endorsement. Such context-dependent, ideology-driven beliefs are linked to people's flexible evaluations of social reality thereby providing an important defensive function for social identity within the context of intergroup conflict.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this research is promising, it presents some limitations. First, these data are cross-sectional and definitely need to be backed up by both longitudinal and experimental evidence. Secondly, in the present study we only zoomed in on conspiracy beliefs as an intergroup phenomenon pointing out the connection between ideologically charged social identities, a particular set of conspiracy beliefs, and group justification tendencies. The extant literature has suggested a plethora of alternative indicators of

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intergroup conspiracy beliefs such as political cynicism (Swami, et al., 2011), lack of psychological empowerment (Bruder, Haffke, Neave, Nouripanah, & Imhoff, 2013), and feelings of relative deprivation and victimhood (e.g., Bilewicz, et al., 2013), but the present study did not account for their effects in the conceptual model. These can act as self-defeating mechanisms of motivated social cognition that can combine in unspecified ways to produce distinct patterns of intra- and intergroup behavior (Douglas et al., 2017). Future research would benefit from a more fine-tuned examination of the processes by which group identification predicts beliefs in intergroup conspiracy theories and the mechanisms by which they trigger the defensive behaviour of the ingroup. Lastly, given the correlational nature of these findings, as mentioned above, another avenue for future research would be to examine reverse causality in a prospective cohort study. Despite these potential methodological limitations, this study can lay the groundwork for a systematic research on conspiracy beliefs that incorporates a robust integrative perspective on both agency and structure.

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Table 1

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (N = 315)

| <i>Variables</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|--|----|------|-------|-------|--------|----------|-----------|
| 1. Euromaidan Supporters | -- | -.00 | .16** | .30** | .58** | 2.45 | 1.45 |
| 2. Euromaidan Opponents | | -- | .11* | .12* | -.23** | 1.10 | 1.32 |
| 3. Crimea-related conspiracy theories | | | -- | .07 | .24** | 3.41 | 1.26 |
| 4. Perceived political corruption | | | | -- | .34** | 2.19 | .89 |
| 5. Justification of the protests’ action | | | | | -- | 3.61 | 1.35 |

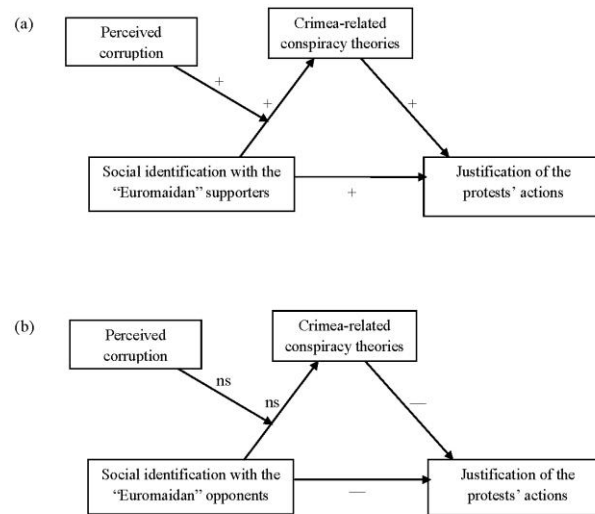


Figure 1a and 1b. Conceptual model of the role of social identification with opinion-based groups in the justification of the protesters' behaviour via conspiracy beliefs. The presence of the predicted relationships is marked with "+" for a positive and "-" for a negative direction of the associations, and "ns" for the expected non-significant effects.

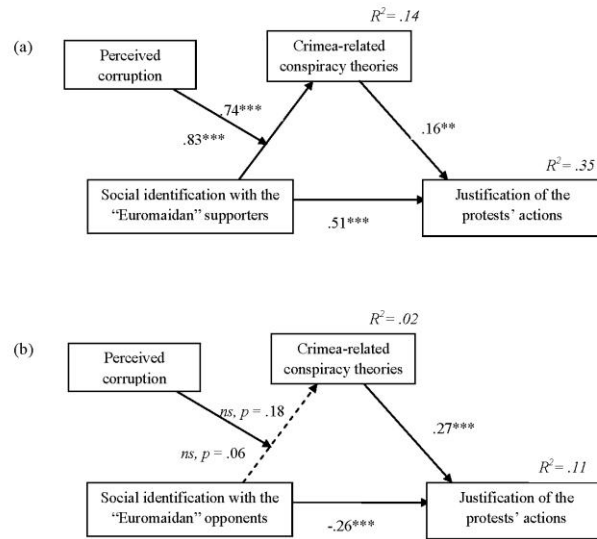


Figure 2a and 2b. Unstandardised coefficients for mediation analyses using the PROCESS (Model 7, 1,000 bootstraps; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$